

# 2007-2008 Survey of Students in Alternative Education Programs

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## **Executive Summary**

In order to better understand the ways in which alternative education programs in the state of Indiana operate, as well as their ability to positively affect the lives of the students they provide services to, students in all funded alternative education schools and programs were asked to complete an Internet survey created by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), in partnership with the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University. 35% of students enrolled in funded alternative education programs participated in the Internet survey. The results of the survey were then compiled, separated into program Types 1-4 and analyzed by IDOE. Results were analyzed to help determine whether programs of each type are operating with fidelity to the program's mission and whether they are implementing effective alternative education practices, as well as to identify successful areas of programs or problematic areas that need to be addressed.

In the category of Student Learning, students feel that they received prompt feedback from teachers and discussed grades or assignments with a teacher fairly often. Students in Type 4 programs felt that they received prompt feedback and discussed grades or assignments with a teacher slightly more often than average, while students in Type 1 programs felt that they received prompt feedback and discussed grades or assignments slightly less often than average. Participating students also report that they agree to strongly agree that they have the skills and abilities to complete their work at their alternative program; however, students in Type 3 programs indicated that they agree with this statement slightly less than students from other programs. Students in all program types reported that they feel their programs emphasize providing the support needed to succeed in school, though students in Type 4 programs felt that their schools provided this support the most. Furthermore, participating students indicated that their alternative programs are being fairly effective in recognizing academic excellence and improvement. Again, students in Type 4 programs felt that their alternative programs were most effective in recognizing academic excellence and improvement while students in Type 1 programs tended to feel that their programs were slightly less effective than average.

Regarding Collaboration, students in Types 1 and 3 programs reported sometimes working with other students on projects or assignments while students in Type 4 programs indicated that they work with other students on projects or assignments slightly less often. Students in Type 2 programs, on the other hand, indicated that although they only sometimes work with other students on projects or assignments, they work with other students more often than other program types. Participating students in all program types indicated that they rarely participate in community or service learning projects. Furthermore, student responses to the online survey demonstrate that, on average, alternative schools emphasize encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds and beliefs somewhat to quite a bit.

In the category of Student Buy-In, students participating in the online survey indicated that they tend to take pride in their work since coming to their alternative program. Students also reported that they feel that it is important to make good grades and that

what they are learning at their alternative program is useful. Students in Types 2 and 4 programs were the most likely to agree this it is important to make good grades, and students in Type 4 programs appeared to find the most relevance in what they are learning. Despite these positive results, participating students in all programs generally did not indicate that they are excited for their classes, although students in Type 4 programs were the most likely to be excited about classes. However, the majority of students did report that they would recommend their alternative school to a friend. Students in Type 1 were less likely to recommend their program to a friend, but given that Type 1 programs are housed in detention centers, these results are not surprising.

In terms of Preparation for Life after High School, students in Type 4 programs tended to rate the majority of these questions the highest. Given that the mission of Type 4 programs specifically includes preparing students for life after high school, this should not be surprising. On average, survey results indicate that students' experiences at their alternative programs have contributed to their growth in writing effectively, speaking effectively, getting along with other students, and thinking deeply. Students in Type 1 programs felt that their experience at their alternative programs contributed to their growth in these areas the least, while students in Type 4 programs tended to feel that their alternative programs contributed to their growth in these areas the most. In terms of getting along with other adults, students in Types 1-3 programs felt that their programs contributed to their growth in this area only somewhat to quite a bit while students in Type 4 program felt that their programs contributed to their growth in this areas quite a bit. Furthermore, participating students in all alternative programs indicated that their alternative program has contributed to their growth in learning on their own, developing clear career goals, making their community a better place, and taking responsibility for their own behavior. Students in Type 4 programs indicated that they were most likely to take responsibility for their own behavior, while students in Type 3 programs demonstrated that they were the least likely to feel that their alternative program contributed to their growth in this area. Moreover, participating students reported that their alternative programs emphasize continuing their education quite a bit (although students in Type 3 programs felt that their programs emphasized continuing their education slightly less) and that their experiences at their alternative program have generally contributed to their growth in preparing for college.

Finally, in the category of Student Support, participating students reported feeling only fairly safe at their alternative programs. Students in Type 4 programs were the most likely to feel safe at their programs while students in Types 1 and 2 programs were the least likely to feel safe. These results indicate that action may need to be taken to ensure that all students feel very safe at their alternative education programs. However, participating students did indicate that they feel accepted for who they are at their alternative programs. Students in Type 4 programs were the most likely to feel this way, while students in Type 1, on average, were the least likely feel this way; however, survey results for students in Type 1 programs varied greatly. Participating students further indicated that there is at least one adult in their alternative education program that cares about them and knows them well. Students in Types 1 and 3 programs tended to make this kind of connection with an adult slightly less than other students. Survey results also

demonstrated that students feel that their experience at their alternative program has contributed to their growth in understanding themselves quite a bit. Students in Type 3 programs felt that their alternative program contributed to their growth in this area slightly less than other programs while students in Type 1 programs felt that their alternative program contributed to their growth in this area slightly more.

## **2007-2008 Student Survey Results: An Analysis by Program Type**

During the 2007-2008 school year, all students enrolled in alternative education schools and programs in Indiana were asked to complete an Internet survey created by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), in partnership with the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP). The survey was issued in order to better understand the following about alternative education programs:

- the level of support for student learning in each alternative education program;
- the level of collaboration each alternative education program encourages among students;
- the level of student buy-in in alternative education programs;
- the extent to which students enrolled in alternative education programs feel prepared for life after high school; and
- the level of support for students enrolled in alternative education programs.

On the survey students were asked questions that provided information for each category described above. Students were asked how often they participated in particular academic and instructional activities; to what extent the alternative program emphasizes particular skill sets, attitudes, and goals; and how much the students' experience at the alternative program has contributed to their growth in a variety of life skills. All of these questions were answered using a four point Likert scale (1=never to 4=very often; and 1=very little to 4=very much). Additionally, the survey asks students to rate their personal attitudes toward and perceptions of the alternative program, their own learning, and their personal academic gains since enrolling in their alternative programs. These questions were answered using a five point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). For a complete list of survey questions, see Appendix A.

After aggregating survey results, survey questions were separated into categories. The categories include: Student Learning (5 questions); Collaboration (3 questions); Student Buy-In (6 questions); Preparation for Life after High School (12 questions); and Student Support (4 questions).

7,943 of 22,701 (35%) students in 196 alternative programs participated in the 2007-2008 online survey and had valid survey data.

### **Program Types**

After the student surveys were complete, results were compiled by IDOE. To protect the confidentiality of survey participants, results were not reported publicly by individual program. Instead, results were separated and analyzed by type of alternative education program. The four types of programs in the state of Indiana are as follows:

- Type 1: a short-term placement at a detention center. The program keeps these students involved in an educational program that addresses skill deficits and

individualizes instruction so they continue to progress academically and do not lose credits.

- Type 2: a program to bring students who have not passed necessary state tests, who have failing grades, or who are in need of credits back to the level of their peers. School personnel employ a variety of strategies to assess, remediate, and accelerate learning for these students, with the goal of transitioning the students to the traditional classroom setting when they have reached appropriate academic levels.
- Type 3: a program to deal with students who have had behavioral/discipline issues ("disruptive students" as defined by IC 20-30-8-2). The purpose is to remove these students from the traditional classroom to modify their behavior so that they can return and be successful. These programs may operate as an alternative to expulsion and generally include behavioral interventions and address social/emotional development, with the goal of transitioning students back to the traditional classroom setting when they have appropriately modified their behavior.
- Type 4: a program to prepare students for life after school by helping them finish their academic studies and teaching them to be productive members of the community. Programming seeks to reengage disengaged students, prepare pregnant or parenting students, and assist students who must work to support themselves or their families by linking the academic programming with career and service learning opportunities.

The disaggregation and analysis of results by program type allows IDOE to determine whether programs of each type are operating with fidelity to the program's mission and whether they are implementing effective alternative education practices. This method of reporting also helps identify areas where program types are excelling or where technical assistance is needed.

## **Survey Demographics**

As noted, the online survey was available to all funded alternative education programs in Indiana. 196 of the 208 (94%) approved alternative education programs in 2007-2008 had students participate. The majority of the students (62%) completing the survey were in grades 9-12; however, this is a slight underrepresentation of all alternative students in grades 9-12 who were served in 2007-2008 (71%). 37% of students who completed the survey were in grades 6-8, a slight overrepresentation of all alternative students in grades 6-8 who were served in 2007-2008 (29%).

20% of the students completing the survey were in 12<sup>th</sup> grade, followed by 20% in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Only 2% of the survey participants were in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 13% of the participants were in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Students in grades 7, 9, and 11 made up about 45% of those completing the survey.

53% of the students completing the survey were male (a slight underrepresentation), compared to 47% who were female (a slight overrepresentation). This is fairly reflective

of all students served by alternative education—in 2007-2008, 58% were male and 42% were female.

The majority of students completing the survey classified themselves as White (47%), followed by 36% Black or African-American, 10% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Native American, 3% Other (unspecified), and 1% Asian. This breakdown is fairly reflective of all students served by alternative education in 2007-2008.

In addition to completing questions described in the next sections, students were asked what they expect their educational outcomes to be. While 6% of the students participating in the survey indicated that they did not believe they would receive a high school diploma, only 2% believed they would not complete high school (the remaining 4% believed they would receive a GED diploma or certificate of completion). On the other hand, 84% of the students surveyed believed they would receive at least a high school diploma, with 62% indicating that they planned to go on to college. 44% said they planned to pursue a four-year degree or higher (Master's or professional degree).

## Student Learning

The category of student learning aims to gauge the level of support for student learning in alternative education programs in Indiana. Survey results are listed in Table 1 (below).

<b>Table 1: Student Learning</b>						
		While at the alternative school, how often have you:		Since I've come to the alternative school I:	To what extent does your alternative school emphasize each of the following:	
		Received prompt feedback from teachers	Discussed grades or assignments with a teacher	Have the skills and abilities to complete my work	Providing the support needed to succeed in school	Recognizing academic excellence and improvement
Type 1	Avg.	2.43	2.29	4.24	2.63	2.58
	Std. Dev.	0.72	1.23	0.44	0.67	0.68
Type 2	Avg.	2.71	2.71	4.25	2.94	2.89
	Std. Dev.	0.37	0.45	0.26	0.28	0.34
Type 3	Avg.	2.69	2.68	4.16	2.89	2.84
	Std. Dev.	0.49	0.60	0.45	0.47	0.48
Type 4	Avg.	2.88	2.85	4.31	3.17	3.09
	Std. Dev.	0.39	0.35	0.25	0.38	0.43
<b>Indiana State Avg.</b>		2.76	2.75	4.26	3.01	2.95

The results from these questions indicate that, on average, while at the alternative school, students feel that they received prompt feedback from teachers fairly often and also fairly often discussed grades or assignments with a teacher. For both questions, students in Type 4 programs reported receiving prompt feedback from teachers and discussing grades or assignments with a teacher slightly more often than program Types 2 and 3. Students in Type 1 programs, on the other hand, reported that they received prompt

feedback from teachers and discussed grades or assignments with a teacher slightly less often than all other program types. Since Type 1 programs are located in detention centers, it might be more difficult for students to obtain immediate access to teachers.

Students also reported that, on average, they agree to strongly agree that they have the skills and abilities to complete their work at the alternative program. However, students in Type 3 programs tended to agree with this statement slightly less than students in other programs.

According to the results, students in Type 4 programs felt the most strongly that their programs emphasize providing the support needed to succeed in school. This is a positive result for Type 4 programs, especially considering that they generally work with students in grades 10-12 and try to prepare them for graduation and life after school. In order to feel prepared to graduate, it would be important for students to feel they were being given the support necessary to be academically successful. On average, students in program Types 1, 2, and 3 also agreed that their programs emphasize providing this support, although students in these types of programs agreed less strongly than students in Type 4 programs. Alternative education has been designed to meet the needs to students who are not succeeding in the traditional school setting. While Type 4 programs work to prepare students for life after high school, Types 1, 2, and 3 programs function to help students and eventually transition students back to the traditional school setting. Although the results of this section generally indicate that students feel that they are getting the support they need to succeed in school, in order to help students after they exit the alternative program, program Types 1, 2, and 3 may want to consider enhancing the learning supports they provide to students.

Furthermore, the survey results demonstrated that, on average, alternative programs are doing a fairly good job of recognizing academic excellence and improvement. According to student perceptions, Type 4 programs appear to recognize excellence and improvement the most, while students indicated that Type 1 programs tend to recognize academic excellence and improvement the least. It is probably not surprising that Type 1 programs are perceived as recognizing academic excellence and improvement the least, given the often short-term nature of the programs. Regardless, Type 1 programs should consider implementing methods to appropriately increase their recognition of student academic excellence and improvement while students are in the programs, especially for students who are with them for longer terms. Moreover, because Types 1-3 programs generally serve students who have previously been academically unsuccessful or who have been disruptive in class, it may be helpful to ensure that systems are in place to recognize students' academic improvement in addition to improvements in behavior.

## **Collaboration**

The category of Collaboration aims to gauge the level of collaboration that alternative education programs encourage among students within the school and between students and their communities. Survey results are listed in Table 2 (below).



<b>Table 2: Collaboration</b>				
		While at the alternative school, how often have you done each of the following?		To what extent does your alternative school emphasize each of the following?
		Worked with other students on projects or assignments	Participated in a community service or service learning project	Encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds and beliefs
Type 1	Avg.	2.38	1.72	2.53
	Std. Dev.	0.95	1.09	0.88
Type 2	Avg.	2.76	1.91	2.73
	Std. Dev.	0.51	0.44	0.34
Type 3	Avg.	2.37	1.86	2.68
	Std. Dev.	0.54	0.58	0.62
Type 4	Avg.	2.26	1.84	2.79
	Std. Dev.	0.54	0.50	0.38
<b>Indiana State Avg.</b>		2.55	1.88	2.74

The results from these questions indicated that in general, students reported sometimes working with other students on projects or assignments while at the alternative program or school. Students in Type 2 programs were most likely to report working collaboratively with other students on projects or assignments, while students in Type 4 programs were least likely to work collaboratively with other students, although they were only slightly less likely to work with other students compared to Type 1 and Type 3 programs. Many Type 4 programs offer individually-paced instruction and independent study using computer-assisted instruction, so it is not surprising that students in these programs are least likely to work with other students on projects or assignments.

Students, on average, also reported having rarely participated in a community or service learning project while at the alternative school. According to the online survey results, students in Type 1 programs were least likely to participate in a community service or service learning project. Due to the fact that Type 1 programs operate in detention centers under strict supervision, these results are not surprising. Types 2-4 programs may consider adding community service or service learning opportunities to their academic components. These types of opportunities can help increase the relevance of what students are learning in school and can help connect students to their communities.

Furthermore, student responses to the online survey demonstrate that, on average, alternative schools emphasize encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds and beliefs somewhat to quite a bit. Encouraging this type of interaction can be helpful in engaging students in their communities and broadening their knowledge base.

### **Student Buy-In**

The category of Student Buy-In aims to rate the level of student buy-in in alternative education programs. Survey results are listed in Table 3 (below).

<b>Table 3: Student Buy-In</b>							
		Since I've come to the alternative school I:					
		Take pride in my work	I have worked harder than I expected to work at the alternative school	I think it is important to make good grades	I think the things I learn at the alternative school are useful	I would recommend this alternative school to a friend	In general, I am excited about my classes
Type 1	Avg.	3.80	3.44	4.39	3.61	2.67	3.19
	Std. Dev.	0.70	0.73	0.44	1.24	1.09	1.22
Type 2	Avg.	3.87	3.71	4.47	3.80	3.33	3.28
	Std. Dev.	0.32	0.42	0.26	0.41	0.67	0.54
Type 3	Avg.	3.74	3.83	4.24	3.78	3.56	3.36
	Std. Dev.	0.45	0.46	0.40	0.44	0.60	0.49
Type 4	Avg.	3.97	4.05	4.41	4.08	4.15	3.69
	Std. Dev.	0.35	0.33	0.31	0.39	0.54	0.45
<b>Indiana State Avg.</b>		3.90	3.84	4.43	3.89	3.63	3.43

The results of these questions indicate that on average, students that participated in the online survey tend to feel that they take pride in their work since coming to the alternative program or school. Of the program types, students in Type 4 programs were slightly more likely to agree with the statement, while student in Type 3 programs were slightly more likely to be neutral about the statement. These results are positive in that they indicate that in general, students feel good about the work they are doing while being served by alternative education.

There is often a misperception that alternative education is easier than traditional education or that alternative education is “watered-down”. However, from the survey results, it appears that students generally feel that they have worked harder than they expected to at the alternative program. Students in Type 4 programs were the most likely to feel they have worked harder than expected—many Type 4 programs offer independent study coupled with projects and required work or internships, which may be one of the reasons students in this type of program feel this way. The fairly high ratings across all four types of programs do appear to indicate, though, that students do not feel that the education they are getting in their alternative program is easier or watered down.

The results of the next question are also very positive—in general, students agree that it is important to receive good grades. Type 2 students were the most likely to agree with this statement, followed closely by students in Type 4 programs. Because alternative programs tend to serve students who have been disengaged in learning, the results of the student survey suggest that alternative programs are generally doing a good job of stressing the importance of academic success to their students. It is especially encouraging that Type 2 programs scored the highest on this question, given that Type 2 programs tend to serve a majority of students who were failing academically. By getting

their students to recognize the importance of good grades, Type 2 programs may be helping students move in the right direction academically.

Stressing the relevance of content is also important for alternative education, given that many students served by alternative education have disengaged from the educational process. As such, the next question in this section (“I think the things I learn at the alternative school are useful”) is important in determining whether alternative programs are helping students understand the relevance of what they are learning. On a positive note, students in general appeared to agree that what they are learning is useful. Students in Type 4 programs were the most likely to agree with this statement; again, this may be because Type 4 programs often offer a combination of academic activities coupled with work, internships, and vocational education (as well as service learning or project-based activities), which may help students connect what they are learning in school with what they will need to succeed after school.

Although students appear to agree that what they are learning is useful, in general, they do not agree or disagree that they are excited about their classes (on average, they are neutral about this statement). However, again students in Type 4 programs tend to be the most likely to agree with this statement, which may be because of the types of classes and programs that are often offered in Type 4 programs. Types 1-3 programs may want to consider adding additional components (both structural and instructional) to their academic programming to help students feel excited and engaged in their courses.

Finally, on average, students generally feel that they would recommend their alternative program to a friend. However, responses from Type 1 programs may slightly skew the state average. Type 1 programs are housed in detention centers; therefore, it is not surprising that students would be less likely to agree that they would recommend the program. On the other hand, the responses from students in Type 4 programs indicate that the majority of students are happy with their alternative program and would recommend it. While the results of this question were fairly high across all program types, program Types 2 and 3 may want to consider identifying ways in which they can build school climate and a sense of identity for the program, which may encourage student buy-in to the program.

### **Preparation for Life after High School**

The category of Preparation for Life after High School aims to gauge the level of preparation for life after high school that alternative education programs provide for students. Survey results are listed in Table 4 (below).

Overall, the results from this section are fairly positive, suggesting that students served by all types of alternative education programs feel that their alternative education experience has at least somewhat (and, more often than not, has very much) helped prepare them for life after school. Because this section focuses on preparation for life after school, it would not be surprising to expect Type 4 programs to score the highest on each of these questions, which is often (but not always) the case. Although Type 4

programs specifically indicate in their missions that they aim to prepare students for life after school, it is quite encouraging that all types of programs appear to put at least some focus on ensuring that students are provided with the skills necessary to succeed in post-secondary education and the workforce.

<b>Table 4: Preparation for Life after High School</b>									
		How much has your experience at this alternative school contributed to your growth in the following areas?							
		Writing effectively	Speaking effectively	Thinking deeply	Getting along with other students	Getting along with other adults	Learning on your own	Solving real-world problems	Developing clear career goals
Type 1	Avg.	2.61	2.62	2.83	2.86	2.87	2.96	2.71	2.78
	Std. Dev.	0.65	0.85	1.27	0.54	0.11	0.82	0.91	0.83
Type 2	Avg.	2.92	2.84	3.00	2.94	2.83	3.01	2.76	2.96
	Std. Dev.	0.35	0.31	0.32	0.40	0.41	0.32	0.32	0.38
Type 3	Avg.	2.79	2.70	2.87	2.88	2.87	2.98	2.66	2.74
	Std. Dev.	0.50	0.49	0.49	0.47	0.44	0.51	0.47	0.53
Type 4	Avg.	2.95	2.85	3.08	3.04	3.09	3.29	2.98	3.01
	Std. Dev.	0.32	0.35	0.36	0.36	0.41	0.31	0.33	0.38
<b>Indiana State Avg.</b>		2.92	2.83	3.01	2.97	2.93	3.11	2.83	2.95

Table 4 (cont.): Preparation for Life after High School					
		How much has your experience at this alternative school contributed to your growth in the following areas?			To what extent does your school emphasize the following?
		Making your community a better place	Preparing for college	Taking responsibility for your behavior	Continuing your education
Type 1	Avg.	2.42	2.53	3.17	2.90
	Std. Dev.	0.32	0.84	1.31	0.82
Type 2	Avg.	2.54	3.04	3.18	3.31
	Std. Dev.	0.41	0.40	0.43	0.34
Type 3	Avg.	2.42	2.67	3.10	3.05
	Std. Dev.	0.59	0.67	0.46	0.51
Type 4	Avg.	2.63	2.90	3.28	3.29
	Std. Dev.	0.47	0.40	0.36	0.37
Indiana State Avg.		2.56	2.95	3.21	3.28

The results from these questions indicate that, on average, students feel that their experience at their alternative school has contributed to their growth in writing effectively, speaking effectively, and getting along with other students quite a bit. For all questions, students in Type 1 programs felt that their alternative programs contributed to their growth in these areas slightly less in comparison to other program types, while

students in Type 4 programs felt that their alternative programs contributed to their growth in these areas slightly more in comparison to other program types. It is likely that Type 4 programs place a greater emphasis on these skills because the very nature of these programs is to prepare students for life after school. However, in order to foster success for students both in and after high school, it is important that all program types place a greater emphasis on skills that prepare them for life after high school.

Furthermore, on average, student responses indicate that students feel that their experience at their alternative school has contributed quite a bit to their growth in thinking deeply. However, students in Types 1 and 3 programs feel that their experience at their alternative school has contributed to their growth only somewhat to quite a bit. Types 2 and 4 programs may contribute slightly more to students' growth in this area as compared to Types 1 and 3 programs because these programs focus more specifically on academics, given that Type 2 programs help students who have failing grades, and the purpose of Type 4 programs is to help students complete high school.

In terms of getting along with other adults, students in Type 1, 2, and 3 programs reported that their experience at their alternative school contributed to their growth in this area somewhat to quite a bit. Students in Type 4 programs indicated that their alternative school contributed to their growth in getting along with other adults quite a bit. Students in Type 4 programs may feel that their alternative schools contribute to their growth in this area more than students in Type 1, 2, and 3 programs because Type 4 programs generally serve older students in high school. Because students in Type 4 programs are generally older, these programs may be more likely to treat these students like adults. Additionally, because the mission of Type 4 programs is often to directly prepare students for life after high school, it is very positive that students feel these programs are helping them getting along with adults, as interpersonal skills are necessary for success in the workforce. Moreover, the fairly high ratings from students in all types of programs on both growth in getting along with other adults and growth in getting along with other students suggests that in general, alternative programs are doing a good job increasing their students' interpersonal skills.

On average, students participating in the online survey indicated that their alternative school contributed to their growth in learning on their own quite a bit to very much. Given that many alternative programs in Indiana are computer-based with students working at their own paces, it makes sense that students generally feel their alternative schools contribute to their growth in learning on their own. These results are positive for alternative education in general, suggesting that alternative programs throughout the state are doing a good job helping students grow in their ability to learn independently, which can be a worthwhile skill in post-secondary education and the workforce.

The mission of many alternative education programs is to prepare students to be successful and productive citizens, which includes preparing them for the workforce. Developing effective career goals can be an important step in this preparation. According to the results of the online survey, students participating in the survey generally felt that their alternative program has contributed to their growth in developing clear career goals.

This is a positive result, as it appears to indicate that most alternative programs, regardless of type, are helping students prepare for the future.

Again, participating students in Type 2 and 4 programs reported that their alternative schools contributed to their growth in this area slightly more than students in Type 1 and 3 programs. In general, it is not surprising that students in Type 4 programs would be most likely to feel that their alternative education experience has helped them better develop career goals. These programs generally serve students in grades 10-12 and are focused on getting the students prepared for life after high school. Although students in Type 1 programs feel that their alternative programs contribute to their growth in developing clear career goals slightly less, the short-term nature of Type 1 programs may be the cause for this. In addition, although Type 1 programs generally have their students for a fairly short time, it is encouraging that students served by these programs tend to agree (albeit slightly less than in other program types) that they have increased their skills at developing career goals. Moreover, students in Type 3 programs were slightly less likely to agree that participation in their alternative program has contributed to their growth in developing clear career goals; however, students in Type 3 programs still tended to indicate that their programs have contributed quite a bit to their growth in developing career goals. It is possible that the slightly lower rating for Type 3 programs in this area is that these programs aim to modify student behavior so that students can return to the traditional school setting. The nature of Type 3 programs is to place a greater emphasis on remedying behavioral issues; therefore, these programs may not spend as much time focusing on career planning and development. However, it is important to note that helping students set goals can be one effective method that can contribute to positively modifying behavior.

Across all program types, participating students reported that their experience at their alternative school has contributed somewhat to their growth in making their community a better place. Overall, this was the lowest rated question in this section. Students may feel that their alternative programs do not focus on this area quite as much as they focus on improving academic and behavioral skills because many programs do emphasize these skills. In addition, students may have difficulty connecting what they are doing in school to community improvement. As previously indicated, few programs appear to be offering service learning or community service. These types of activities may help students feel more connected to their communities and may help students better see their roles in improving and enhancing their communities. As such, programs may want to consider adding community service and service learning components. At the same time, programs should ensure that these components are clearly linked to what students are learning academically to increase the relevance of academic subjects.

The results from the online student survey further indicate that participation in alternative education contributed to student growth in taking responsibility for their behavior quite a bit to very much. Participating students in Type 4 programs were slightly more likely to report that their alternative school has contributed to their growth in this area, while students in Type 3 programs were least likely to indicate that their alternative school has contributed to their growth in taking responsibility for their behavior. These results are

most likely due to the fact that students in Type 3 programs are primarily students who have demonstrated disruptive behavior and may need additional supports to develop this responsibility. Although Type 3 programs had the lowest ratings in this area, on average students still felt that their Type 3 alternative programs had contributed to their growth in developing responsibility for their behavior quite a bit, which is very encouraging, considering that the mission of Type 3 programs is to positively modify behavior.

Finally, participating students indicated, on average, that their alternative school emphasizes continuing their education quite a bit. These results are very encouraging, being that many students enrolled in alternative education have been disengaged in school. Moreover, these students may be more likely to drop out of school, as demonstrated by the number of students intending to withdraw or having already withdrawn from school, disruptive students, and students that have failed to comply academically. The survey results appear to indicate that all types of programs are providing at least some emphasis on continuing education (though students in Types 1 and 3 programs were slightly less likely to report that their programs emphasize continuing education). The fact that over 60% of students who participated in the survey indicated that they plan to complete at least a four-year degree may be reflective of the general emphasis that alternative programs are placing on continuing education.

Furthermore, on average, survey results indicate that students' experiences at their alternative programs have generally contributed to their growth in preparing for college. Participating students reported that Type 2 programs were slightly more likely to contribute to their growth in preparing for college. These results are very encouraging and may be due to the fact that Type 2 programs have a strong academic focus, being that they function to help bring students who have not passed necessary state tests, who have failing grades, or who are in need of credits back to the level of their peers. Because students have many different career paths which may include college, junior college, or vocational schools, it is not surprising that alternative programs generally place a greater emphasis on students continuing their education rather than specifically preparing students for college. Furthermore, a significant number of students indicated that they wished to pursue a post-secondary education. According to online survey results, 62.1% of participating students believe they will pursue a post-secondary education. An additional 10.4% of participating students either did not know their plans for after high school or had no response. The high number of students wanting to pursue a post-secondary education or being uncertain of their plans after high school suggests that it may be in the best interests of students if all alternative programs implemented practices to better prepare students for college specifically as well as to encourage students to continue their education in general.

## **Student Support**

The category of Student Support aims to gauge the level of support that students receive in alternative education programs. Survey results are listed in Table 5 (below).

The results from these questions indicate that students participating in the online survey, on average, feel fairly safe at their alternative programs. Students in Type 4 programs were most likely to agree with this statement. Students in Types 1 and 2 programs, however, were the least likely to agree with this statement. Overall, the results from this question are somewhat concerning because all students should be made to feel safe in their educational setting. The results suggest that all alternative programs need to take action in order to ensure that all students feel very safe at their alternative schools or programs.

<b>Table 5: Student Support</b>					
		Since I've come to the alternative school:			How much has your experience at this alternative school contributed to your growth in the following areas?
		I feel safe at my alternative school	Overall, people at my alternative school accept me for who I am	There is at least one adult at my school that cares about me and knows me well	Understanding yourself
Type 1	Avg.	3.49	3.63	3.54	3.13
	Std. Dev.	0.30	1.42	0.88	0.46
Type 2	Avg.	3.42	3.74	3.86	3.11
	Std. Dev.	0.62	0.44	0.48	0.44
Type 3	Avg.	3.72	3.80	3.69	2.98
	Std. Dev.	0.48	0.49	0.59	0.50
Type 4	Avg.	4.10	4.08	4.01	3.07
	Std. Dev.	0.46	0.38	0.40	0.37
<b>Indiana State Avg.</b>		3.69	3.86	3.89	3.08

Student responses further indicate, on average, that participating students feel accepted for who they are at their alternative programs. These results are positive, given that many students served by alternative education may have struggled in the traditional educational setting due to unique needs or circumstances. Again, results demonstrate that participating students in Type 4 programs were more likely to agree with this statement. On average, students in Type 1 program were least likely to agree with this statement. Furthermore, the standard deviation of Type 1 program student responses was 1.42. This high standard deviation indicates that student responses to this question varied greatly. Some students feel that they are very much accepted for who they are, while some students feel that they are very much not accepted for who they are at their Type 1 program. The wide range of student responses may be due to the fact that Type 1 programs operate in detention centers, where students are typically away from home and being punished for actions or crimes that they have committed.

Positive relationships are important for students, especially in alternative education programs. As such, it is important that students served by alternative education feel that they are surrounded by caring adults. On average, students participating in the online survey feel that there is at least one adult at their alternative school that cares about them



and knows them well. While students in Types 1 and 3 programs tend to be slightly less likely to agree with this statement, overall it appears that alternative programs are attempting to promote positive relationships.

The final question in the category of Student Support asks students how much their experience at the alternative school has contributed to their growth in understanding themselves. Survey responses indicate that, on average, students feel that their alternative school contributes to their growth in understanding themselves quite a bit. Students in Type 3 programs were slightly less likely to feel this way. Students in Type 3 programs may feel that their alternative schools contribute to their growth in understanding themselves slightly less than other students in alternative education programs due to the fact that the very nature of the program is to modify disruptive student behavior. Because these programs function to modify student behavior so that these students can return to the traditional school setting, it is likely that students feel a little less understanding of themselves as they undergo this transformative process. Interestingly, students in Type 1 programs were slightly more likely than average to feel that their experience at their alternative school has contributed to their growth in understanding themselves. Given that Type 1 programs operate in detention centers and often serve adjudicated students, this is a very positive result. This result suggests that Type 1 programs are making efforts to help students examine their behavior and actions and to be reflective about themselves.

### **Overall Recommendations**

All in all, survey responses of students participating in the 2007-2008 online student survey paint a very positive picture of alternative education programs in Indiana. Survey results have illuminated many areas where alternative education programs across the state are doing a good job of helping meet the needs of students that are at-risk of academic failure and who have previously not been succeeding in the traditional classroom setting. However, in order better equip alternative education programs to help students excel in their schools and programs even further, IDOE offers the following recommendations for alternative education programs based on student survey results.

First, student survey results indicate that students across all program types generally feel that they are getting the support they need to succeed in school while attending their alternative education programs. Although these results are very positive, program Types 1, 2, and 3 may consider enhancing the learning supports that they provide to students in order to further enable them to make a successful transition back into the traditional school setting.

Survey results have further demonstrated that, on average, alternative programs emphasize recognizing academic excellence and improvement somewhat to quite a bit. However, students participating in the online survey indicated that program Types 1, 2, and 3 emphasize recognizing academic excellence and improvement a little less than Type 4 programs. Recognizing academic excellence and improvement is important for building students' confidence in school as well as for students to understand when they are doing something well. Positive reinforcement often encourages students to continue

doing well. In order to develop students' confidence to achieve at their highest potential, it may be helpful for program Types 1-3 to ensure that systems are in place to recognize students' academic improvement and academic success while they are enrolled in an alternative education program.

Survey results also indicated that students rarely participate in a community service or service learning project while at their alternative education program. Program Types 2-4 may consider adding community service or service learning components to their academic components or curriculum. At the same time, programs should ensure that these components are clearly linked to what students are learning academically to increase the relevance of academic subjects. Opportunities such as these may help students feel better connected to their communities as well as find relevance in the things that they learn in school.

On average, students reported being only somewhat excited for classes. However, participating students in Type 4 programs tended to report that they were more excited about classes than the average ratings. The nature of alternative education is to help students who have become disengaged from school become reengaged in order to help them succeed academically. Students enter alternative education programs because they intend to or have withdrawn from school, have failed to comply academically, or because they have demonstrated disruptive behavior (among other reasons). In order to help these students that have previously been disengaged from school, program Types 1-3 may want to consider adding additional structural and instructional components to their academic programming in order to help students feel excited and engaged in their courses at their alternative program. Student-led discussions, project- and problem-based activities, and service learning and community service opportunities are some of the components that could be implemented to help students feel engaged and excited about their classes.

Participating students' responses indicated that students would recommend their alternative program to a friend. Generally speaking, these results are very positive. However, students in Types 2 and 3 were slightly less likely to feel this way. Consequently, these programs may want to identify ways in which they can build school climate and a sense of identity for their programs that will encourage student buy-in to the program.

In order to promote success for students after high school, it is important that all program types place a greater emphasis on specific skills that prepare students for life after high school, such as writing effectively, speaking effectively, and getting along with other students. However, generally speaking, students participating in the online survey indicated that they feel their alternative programs do a good job at encouraging them to continue to their education and in preparing them for college. Due to the high number of students who indicated that they wish to pursue a post-secondary education as well as those students that are uncertain of their life paths after high school, all alternative programs should continue to implement and enhance practices geared toward better preparing students for college specifically, as well as to encourage students to continue their education in general.

Finally, student online survey responses demonstrated that students generally feel only fairly safe at their alternative programs. These results suggest that alternative programs should take immediate action and implement practices and procedures that will help ensure that all students feel very safe at their alternative schools or programs. Students must always feel safe at their alternative school in order to promote both the safety and well-being of each student. Furthermore, increasing students' feelings of safety may have a strong, positive impact on learning as students are able to feel more comfortable and have fewer distractions.

For a quick overview of specific recommendations for each type of alternative education program in Indiana, see Table 6 (below).

<b>Table 6: Recommendations</b>				
<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Program Type</b>			
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Consider enhancing the learning supports provided to students in order to further enable them to make a successful transition back into the traditional school setting.	✓	✓	✓	
Ensure that systems are in place to recognize students' academic improvements and academic successes.	✓	✓	✓	
Include community service or service learning components to academic components.		✓	✓	✓
Encourage contact among students of different backgrounds and beliefs.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Consider adding additional structural and instructional components to academic programming in order to help students feel excited and engaged in their courses at their alternative program.	✓	✓	✓	
Identify ways in which to build school climate and sense of identify that will encourage student buy-in to the program.		✓	✓	
Place a greater emphasis on specific skills that prepare students for life after high school.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Implement practices to better prepare students for college specifically as well as to encourage students to continue their education in general.	✓	✓	✓	✓
Implement practices and procedures that will help ensure that all students feel safe at their alternative schools or programs.	✓	✓	✓	✓

### **Positive Implications**

In brief, the student responses from the 2007-2008 online student survey have yielded very encouraging results. For example, survey results suggest that students generally receive feedback from teachers with reasonable promptness and generally discuss grades or assignments with teachers. Furthermore, participating students have reported that they agree to very strongly agree that they have the skills and abilities to complete their work. Considering that a large number of students are enrolled in alternative education due to failing to comply academically (57.7%) or having intended to withdraw or already having withdrawn from school (9.5%), these results are very positive. The results from this survey question suggest that alternative education programs are doing a good job at helping students to achieve academic success that may lead to graduation or to successful transitions back to the traditional school setting. Additionally, participating students in Type 4 programs reported that their alternative programs are generally providing the

support needed to succeed in school. Given that Type 4 programs aim to prepare students for life after high school, and help students graduate from high school, it is especially encouraging that these programs are helping students to feel that they can succeed academically. All in all, student survey responses appear to indicate that alternative education programs are functioning with fidelity to their missions and providing students with the learning supports needed to be academically successful in school.

Survey results also appear to defy the common misconception that alternative education is “watered-down” and easier than traditional education. Student survey responses indicate that students generally feel that they have worked harder than they expected to at their alternative education program, suggesting that alternative education is not easier or “watered-down” compared to the traditional school setting. In fact, students in alternative education appear to be at least just as challenged in their alternative education setting as in the traditional school setting. In addition to students reporting that they feel they are working hard at their alternative education programs, students participating in the online survey further indicated that they tend to feel that they take pride in their work. Clearly these results are very positive and it is encouraging that students in alternative education feel they are met with an appropriately rigorous curriculum.

Furthermore, participating students indicated that they generally feel that what they are learning is useful, especially students in Type 4 programs. Because students appear to find relevance in the things that they are learning in alternative education, it is not surprising that participating students also generally agree that it is important to make good grades. These results are extremely positive. There is often a negative stereotype associated with students in alternative education that they are not willing to learn. However, student survey results demonstrate that students in alternative education are willing and ready to learn and also think that it is important to make good grades. Survey results suggest that alternative education programs in Indiana are generally positively working to reengage students with school and their educations. Perhaps this is a reason that students in alternative education generally feel that they would recommend their alternative program to a friend. In sum, the online student survey demonstrates that the majority of students work hard in their alternative programs, take pride in their work, feel that what they are learning is useful, think it is important to make good grades, and are generally happy with their alternative education programs.

Overall, student survey results suggest that alternative education programs throughout the state are doing a good job of preparing students for life after high school. Generally speaking, participating student responses indicate that alternative education programs are helping students acquire and build necessary skills that will help them graduate and be successful after high school graduation. Student responses demonstrate that students feel that their alternative programs have contributed to their growth in getting along with both adults as well as other students. These results are very positive and suggest that alternative education programs are being effective in helping students increase their interpersonal skills. Survey results further indicate that students feel that their alternative education programs are also helping them grow in their ability to learn independently.

Naturally, these are valuable skills and abilities in a post-secondary education setting as well as in the workforce.

Alternative education programs throughout Indiana further appear to prepare students for the future by contributing to their growth in developing clear career goals. Students participating in the online survey generally indicated that they feel their alternative education program helps them in this area. These results demonstrate that alternative education programs are better preparing students for life after high school by helping them identify specific career paths and understanding the steps necessary to make their goals become a reality.

According to survey results, participating students also indicated that their alternative education programs contributed to their growth in taking responsibility for their own behavior. Not only do alternative education programs encourage students to take responsibility for their behavior, but student survey results additionally indicate that participating students feel that their alternative programs contribute quite a bit to their growth in understanding themselves. Developing responsibility and increasing self-awareness and understanding is especially important for students served by alternative education programs, because many students in alternative education have previously had behavioral issues or have had difficulty in the traditional educational setting. In addition, these skills will be valuable for students in ensuring successful transitions back to the traditional classroom setting and in preparing students for the workforce. Survey results indicate that alternative education programs are helping students to examine their behavior and actions and to be reflective about themselves. This self-reflection may help explain why many students are taking more responsibility for their behavior. In general, student responses suggest that students are undergoing a transformative process and are positively modifying their behavior which will benefit them in life after high school.

Moreover, participating students reported that they feel accepted for who they are while at their alternative education programs. These results are clearly very positive. Many of the students enrolled in alternative education have struggled in school due to their unique needs or circumstances, such as needing extra help or time on assignments, or being a parent or expectant parent (among other things). Because of this, it is very encouraging that students generally feel accepted at their alternative education programs, despite their reasons for enrolling. The more students feel accepted and supported, the more likely they are to re-engage in school and be successful. Furthermore, participating students have reported that there is at least one adult at their alternative education program that cares about them and knows them well. Again, these are very encouraging results considering the number of students that have struggled due to their unique needs. Student responses indicate that alternative programs are doing a good job of promoting positive relationships which are vital to students' academic success. These results suggest that alternative programs are also hiring appropriate staff who are able to build connections with students to help promote their academic and personal growth while in the program. All in all, online student survey results exhibit that alternative education programs throughout the state are generally doing a good job of addressing the support that students in alternative education need in order to succeed academically.

## Appendix A

While at the alternative school, how often have you done each of the following (1=Never to 4=Very Often)?

- Asked questions in class
- Contributed to class discussion
- Made a class presentation
- Received prompt feedback from teachers
- Worked on a paper or project using information from several sources
- Included diverse viewpoints in class discussions
- Worked with other students on projects or assignments
- Put together ideas or concepts from different subjects when completing assignments
- Learned something from discussing questions that have no clear answers
- Participated in a community service or service learning project
- Enjoyed completing a task that required a lot of thinking and mental effort
- Used the Internet/Web to complete an assignment
- Discussed grades or assignments with a teacher
- Written a paper (> 3 pages)

Since I've come to the alternative school (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree):

- I take pride in my work
- I have the skills and abilities to complete my work
- I value the rewards that I get at school for my work
- I feel supported and respected by teachers
- I feel supported and respected by counselors
- I feel supported and respected by administrators
- I feel supported and respected by secretaries or admin assistants
- I feel supported and respected by other students
- I get to make choices about what I will study at school
- I have many opportunities to ask teachers questions about my work
- I have worked harder than I expected to work at the alternative school
- I think school rules are fair
- I think it is important to make good grades
- I help determine how my school work is evaluated
- I care about my alternative school
- I place a high value on learning
- I have a voice in classroom decisions
- I have opportunities to be creative in my school assignments
- I think the things I learn at the alternative school are useful
- I feel safe at my alternative school
- The support I get at my alternative school encourages me to learn more
- I am challenged to do my best work at school
- Overall, people at my alternative school accept me for who I am
- I would recommend this alternative school to a friend
- In general, I am excited about my classes

- There is at least one adult in my school who cares about me and knows me well

To what extent does your alternative school emphasize each of the following (1=Very Little to 4=Very Much)?

- Spending a lot of time studying and on school work
- Providing the support needed to succeed in school
- Preparing for standardized tests
- Encouraging contact among students of different backgrounds and beliefs
- Using computers in class work
- Providing helpful comments on student performance
- Encouraging students to explore new ideas
- Recognizing academic excellence and improvement
- Involving students in school leadership and governance
- Treating students fairly
- Continuing your education

How much has your experience at this alternative school contributed to your growth in the following areas (1=Very Little to 4=Very Much)?

- Learning work-related skills
- Writing effectively
- Speaking effectively
- Thinking deeply
- Using computers and other technology
- Working well with others
- Getting along with other students
- Getting along with other adults
- Learning on your own
- Solving real-world problems
- Developing clear career goals
- Making your community a better place
- Preparing for college
- Understanding yourself
- Developing personal values
- Taking responsibility for your behavior
- Learning self-control